News Release
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Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

Ministère de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée

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RECORD LEVELS OF ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATIONS REACHED IN ONTARIO

Minister Says Donations Are On The Rise But More Still To Be Done

TORONTO – The lives of more than 880 people were saved as organ and tissue donations hit record levels in 2006, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

"Organ and tissue donations save lives," said Smitherman. "By making an informed decision and letting family and loved ones know, everyone has the opportunity to give the gift of life for the 1,700 people on the organ donation waiting list."

In 2006, 883 lives were saved as a result of living and deceased donation – 112 more than in 2005. The organ and tissue donors included:

- 274 living donations – an increase from 247 in 2005
- 172 deceased donors – up from 148 in 2005
- 843 tissue donors – an increase from 436 in 2005

"These results are great news," said Frank Markel, President and CEO of Trillium Gift of Life Network, a government agency responsible for planning, promoting, coordinating and supporting organ and tissue donation across Ontario. "But we know we can do better and that we need to keep working. Every three days someone on the organ donation waiting list dies. I want to remind Ontarians to sign their donor cards and have the conversation with their families about organ and tissue donation. It's a conversation that can make a difference. As you can see today, it's a decision that can save a life."

Currently in Ontario, there are 1,742 people on the transplant waiting list. This includes 1,074 men, 623 women and 45 children.

"Our dedicated transplant team is making a difference in the lives of many by pioneering innovative approaches to organ transplantation and encouraging people to give the gift of life," said Dr. Robert Bell, CEO of the University Health Network.

"I'm so proud and grateful to be a double lung recipient," said 14-year-old Brandon Gibson. "I'm living proof that organ donation saves lives. I owe all my thanks to a wonderful family out there who in their darkest moment made a conscious decision to save a life. Thank you for taking away my oxygen tank, and for helping me to play hockey again. I love playing with my sisters and my friends. I wouldn't be here if someone hadn't had the conversation about their organ donation wishes. Sign your donor card and speak to your family today about what you would want. Someone did and saved my life. You can too."

Everyone is a potential organ and tissue donor. The oldest Canadian organ donor to date was over 90

years of age while the oldest tissue donor was 102. Ultimately the ability to become an organ and tissue donor depends on several factors including the health of the organs and tissue.

"The McGuinty government is proud of the work by health professionals, donors and their families who make a difference for so many people," said Smitherman. "We want to promote greater awareness about everyone's potential to become a donor. That's why we created a citizen's panel to gather views from Ontarians on how to increase organ donation in this province. We look forward to hearing from this panel."

In November 2006, the minister created the Citizen's Panel for Increasing Organ Donation. The panel is currently traveling across the province hearing from Ontarians about organ donation. The panel will report to the minister in March.

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities - keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

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